

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

APRIL 1999

ONE DOLLAR





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

The preliminary figures for the 1998-1999 big game harvest have just been compiled, and it appears that the unseasonable weather during this past hunting season was a major influence on our deer, bear, and turkey harvest. You may remember that the season started with unusually warm conditions, along with extremely dry weather, and concluded with a fierce ice storm. Overall, our harvest numbers for deer and turkey were lower than the previous year, while the harvest number for bears increased. Throughout the season the abundant mast crop kept deer and turkey from venturing out into the open to seek food, making them less available to harvest. The lower deer and turkey figures were found statewide. According to our preliminary calculations, this year hunters took 178,102 deer compared with 197,955 checked last year. Fall turkey hunters reported a harvest of 8,802 birds this year compared with the 1997 harvest of 11,168.

Bears, on the other hand, responded to the warm weather by not going into their dens quite as early, making them more available to harvest. Bear hunters reported a harvest of 914 bears in the 1998-1999 season compared with last year's harvest of 788. Most of the increase came from counties west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which accounted for nearly 78 percent of the harvest.

While hunting is one tool used by the Department in its management of the Commonwealth's wildlife resources, an equally important part of our efforts is the research gathered in the field by our biological staff. From this work, we estimate that the deer population across the state to be at just under one million animals, and we have made changes in our deer management program that have been designed to stabilize and/or reduce the growing deer herd over much of Virginia. Results so far look encouraging. Extensive research has also helped us to successfully restore the wild turkey, and this population is currently estimated to be in the range of about 110,000. Our participation in the Cooperative Alleghany Bear Study is helping us to better understand the approximately 4,000 black bears in Virginia.

Although we study population numbers and harvest figures with great interest, there are other numbers that always cause us much concern—and that's the reports we receive about hunting-related accidents. While there are relatively few incidents when you consider the number of hunters in the woods, without a doubt, one accident is too many.

With spring gobbler season upon us, the most consequential message that we can deliver from the Department is one of safety while in the fields and forests. The key to a safe spring

season is responsible conduct, including compliance with our wildlife laws. When you are out in the woods remember these three rules: first, treat every firearm as if it were loaded; second, control the direction of your firearm's muzzle; and third, clearly identify your target and what is beyond it. This last rule is extremely critical during the spring gobbler season.

The spring gobbler season starts April 17 and runs through May 22, 1999, statewide. Hunters must have a bear, deer, turkey license in addition to a state or county hunting license. A National Forest Stamp is required while hunting in the national forests, and a State Forest Stamp is required while hunting in our state forests. Legal hunting hours are one half hour before sunrise until noon each day. The bag limit is one bird per day, three per license year, of which no more than two may be taken in the fall or spring. During spring gobbler season only bearded turkeys can be harvested.

While harvesting game is certainly one goal of your day in the woods, it is far more important to have a safe and enjoyable experience. Our emphasis is always on safety and ensuring that the hunting community is aware of our laws and regulations that foster safe hunting and lead to that enjoyable experience.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

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Cover: Wild turkey by ©Scotty Lovett.

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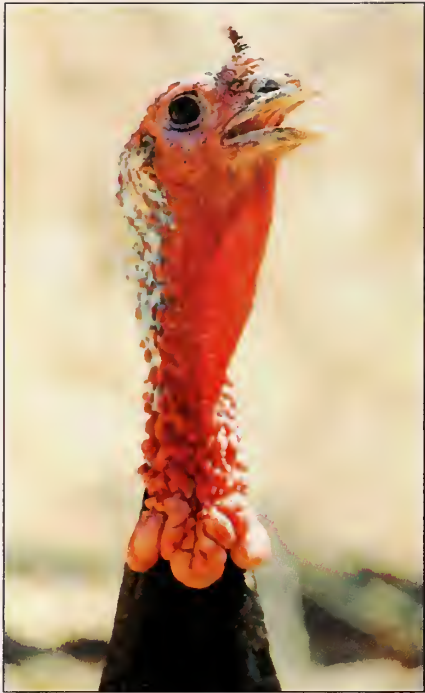
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*Hunting strategies
from the experts
that will help you
make it to the top.*

by Bruce Ingram

The routine for climbing the Botetourt County mountain never varies. At 3:00 a.m., the alarm rings, a few minutes later I ingest two bagels and a glass of apple juice. After donning camo, I drive a half hour to the wayside at the foot of the mountain.

When I get out of my car, I always experience some feelings of dread, I

sometimes even wish that I had gone somewhere else to hunt. For my body and mind, already beginning to rebel, knows what lies ahead—a two-hour, constant ascent to the mountain peak which serves as a listening post. My heart, though, is where it wants to be, and I follow its lead.

Fifteen minutes into the climb, my body begins to perspire and twenty minutes more I am drenched with sweat. Fortunately, over the years, I have learned to walk up the mountain dressed only in camo pants, a short sleeve tee-shirt, and most importantly, a blaze orange cap.



Hunting Western Virginia



e's Mountain Gobblers

Another hour into the climb, the whip-poor-wills, which earlier had been calling only sporadically, begin incessantly belting out their plaintive melody. Twenty minutes later, the first cardinal of the day breaks into song, quickly followed by the "drink your teaaaaa" of a towhee.

Arriving at the mountain peak I

With close to two million acres available for public hunting, Virginia's western mountains offer endless opportunity to pursue the elusive wild turkey during the spring hunting season.

quickly try to wipe the perspiration from my body, an impossible task. I then begin putting the rest of my camo clothing on and wait for that first gobble of the morning. When that event occurs, the only certainty is that whatever unfolds will be totally unlike whatever has happened before.

Over the years, I have averaged killing a gobbler about once for every ten times I climb the mountain—a terrible percentage if one is shooting free throws, kicking field goals, or hitting a baseball—but a satisfying enough percentage if one is turkey hunting in the mountains of western Virginia.

Sherry Crumley, co-owner of Trebark Outfitters in Roanoke with her husband Jim, pursues turkeys across the country. She expresses a great deal of respect for highland toms.

"Often when I am out of state and after a particular sub-species of turkey, people will ask me which is the most difficult kind of turkey to hunt," says Sherry. "I always answer that the Eastern wild turkey of the mountains of western Virginia is the most challenging.

"For example, you might be on a ridge and hear a gobbler sound off on the adjacent ridge just 200 yards away. You then chase after him, and end up running about 600 yards as you go down one ridge and up the next one to get on the turkey's level. By then you are exhausted, sweating like crazy, and the bird's probably not there any more anyway. Or worse, you spooked the gobbler when you climbed the mountain or he has sailed across the mountain to where you were standing when you first heard him."

Still, certain strategies exist that can increase the odds for success. Crumley maintains that the wisest thing anyone can do is learn the lay of a mountain. For example, Sherry says, that when she hunts a particu-

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lar mountain for the initial time, the first thing she learns is where the old logging roads meander.

These tote roads are natural travel ways for both the toms and hens, and the former utilize them as strutting grounds as well. Sooner or later, a logging road will pass by a saddle, that is a dip in the topography which often leads to a hollow. A prime hollow will possess hardwoods and a brook, making it a superlative place for birds to feed and mate. If some species of evergreen (in western Virginia that usually means eastern hemlocks and Virginia and white pines) grows in the hollow, the turkeys will often roost there as well.

Shelves and benches, continues Sherry, are also important features. Shelves, also known as flats, are sometimes defined as level areas that extend some 25 yards out from the side of a mountain and perhaps run about 75 yards long. A bench is nothing more than a long shelf which can continue for a mile or more.

Turkeys love to roost on shelves and flats and will sometimes use them as strutting grounds. Sherry says that a favorite maneuver of hers is to walk along a ridge that lies above a number of shelves and benches. This is a particularly solid gambit late in the morning if you have been unable to contact birds.

Use Mountain Terrain to Your Advantage

An incident that occurred several years ago is a good example of how to "play" upland terrain. I had followed an old logging trail to a saddle that led to a hardwood hollow. When dawn broke, I heard a gobbler thunder on a shelf on the opposite side of the hollow.

I ran across the hollow and eased my way onto the side of the shelf farthest from where the turkey gobbled. A half hour later, after I had plied the old boy with a series of soft yelps from my diaphragm, he appeared just 25 yards in front of me and my hunt ended successfully.

Bob Brownlow, an ophthalmologist and avid turkey hunter from Roanoke, agrees that playing the terrain should be an integral part of mountain hunting. In fact, the Roanoker's calling strategy goes hand-in-hand with his terrain tactics.

For example, at dawn several years ago, Brownlow was walking along the bottom of a ridge that ran east to west. Knowing that a gobbler would likely not come down to his calling and not wanting to make the steep ascent unless he had to, Brownlow used a barred owl caller to ascertain if a bird was roosting above him. Sure enough, a tom sounded off about 150 yards away to his right.

Feeling that he would be spotted if he ran straight at the turkey and wanting to get on the same level as

the bird (mountain turkeys are notoriously hard to call downhill), Brownlow used a ridge spine between him and the bird to shield his ascent to the top of the mountain.

Once the hunter arrived right below the top of the mountain, he waited until he heard the bird gobble again before stepping onto the ridge top. The bird did gobble, indicating that it had passed over the "lip" on the opposite side of the ridge. Brownlow then set up on the ridge, and for the first time that morning, actually made a turkey call. The ensuing duel ended in Brownlow's favor a few minutes later.

This anecdote offers several lessons. First, use locator calls, such as the barred owl and crow, to make turkeys gobble; in other words, let these callers do the "walking up



mountains" part for you. Second, call sparingly or not at all until you are actually on a gobbler's level and ready to work a bird. And last, understand that ridge spines, lips, humps, and other irregularities in mountain terrain can conceal your approach and also result in your getting closer to a gobbler.

Physically Condition Yourself for Mountain Hunting

Not everyone should attempt a trek deep into the Old Dominion's hinterlands. If you are overweight,

doors and the majestic wild turkey. Perhaps you will have the opportunity to experience a highland fling of your own this spring. □

Bruce Ingram lives in the rolling hills of Fincastle, VA and is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife magazine.



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(Upper left) Jim and Sherry Crumley analyze some turkey scratchings high on a Botetourt County mountain. (Middle) No matter where you hunt, a variety of calls is important. (Right) When walking through the woods or while still-hunting during the spring gobbler season, hunters should consider wearing or displaying blaze orange.

have a heart condition, or suffer from shortness of breath, then check with your physician before going afield.

To help prepare for mountain hunting, I jog two miles per day three or four days a week throughout the year. I also try to follow a diet with plenty of lean meat (such as venison, fish, and wild and domestic turkey) as well as vegetables, fruits, breads, milk and fruit juices. I find a light breakfast, such as the one mentioned at the beginning of the story, better to climb mountains on than the traditional hunter's—and grease laden—"country breakfast." If I plan to hunt all morning, I often place menu items such as apples, bananas and peanut butter crackers in my backpack. An eight-ounce plastic container of water provides a liquid pick-me-up.

Venturing high and deep into the spring mountains of western Virginia is an enriching experience for any individual who loves the out-

Where to Go Options

Combined, the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests consist of 1,657,256 acres in the Commonwealth. For more information on planning a trip, contact the national forest at 5162 Valley Pointe Parkway, Roanoke, VA 24019-3050, (540) 265-5100. The forest's home page is <http://www.fs.fed.us/gwjnf>. The Roanoke office can put readers in touch with the ranger districts closest to their homes.

State wildlife management areas, such as Gathright, Little North Mountain, and Clinch Mountain to name just a few, are scattered across western Virginia and provide some marvelous hunting. For more information on these WMAs, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230, (804) 367-1000.

Another option is Westvaco timber company land. For more information, contact Westvaco at P.O. Box 577, Rupert, WV 25984, (304) 392-6373). □



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Renaiss On the



A photograph of a person fishing on the Rappahannock River. The person is standing on a rocky outcrop in the water, wearing a hat, a backpack, and waders. The river is calm, and the background shows a dense forest of trees with autumn foliage. The text "ance Rapp" is visible on the left side of the image.

ance Rapp

A rich history, abundance of wildlife, and great fishing makes this one of our nation's most pristine rivers.

by King Montgomery

The Rappahannock River flows 185 miles from its spring source on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Fauquier County to the Chesapeake Bay at Stingray Point and Windmill Point. From its humble beginnings, this beautiful river grows to almost four miles wide at its mouth. It has many faces over its winding course, from babbling brook to scenic stream to tidal river below the fall line at Fredericksburg to saltwater as it nears the Bay. Fortunately, for the fish and wildlife within its influence, the Rappahannock River runs relatively free and clean over most of its course. Only one small obstacle of questionable use and value, Embry Dam above the city of Fredericksburg, mars its flow and blocks migrating fishes from their traditional spawning grounds. Still, it is one of the most unspoiled rivers on the East Coast and there is serious discussion about making it even better by removing the dam. The Rappahannock River's vibrant life-force seems to connect time as well as terrain, carrying me back to the river's role in a nation's search for identity and definition.

During the spring of each year fish, like shad, herring and striped bass, make their way from the Chesapeake Bay up the river to Embry Dam, in Fredericksburg. Anglers are reminded there is a closed season on American and hickory shad and the creel limit is zero (catch and release only).

Photos ©King Montgomery

In December 1862, General Burnside's Union Army of the Potomac forced a bloody crossing of the Rappahannock River into Fredericksburg. The outnumbered Confederates, comprising many Virginia regiments including the three brigades of Pickett's division, moved to the high ground outside of town, prepared defensive positions, some behind stone fences, and waited. The Federals, very poorly led by the hapless Burnside, bravely hurled themselves head-on in brutal frontal uphill assaults against the well-hidden and protected Southerners supported by artillery. When General James Longstreet, the Confederate corps commander on Marye's Heights ordered more cannon brought up, his artillery chief reported: "General, we cover that ground now so well that we will comb it as with a fine-tooth comb. A chicken could not live on that field when we open on it." His words would prove prophetic.

When it was over, the Federal toll in killed and wounded was over 12,500, compared to the Confederate losses of around 5,000. But today, the pontoon bridges are gone from the river, and instead of running red with blood, the water rippled a pleasant blue-green.

"Fish on!" exclaimed Smith Coleman matter-of-factly, as his nine foot fly rod danced rhythmically with a hickory shad at the end of his line. It was April on the tidal Rappahannock at Falmouth/Fredericksburg. Spring freshets raised the river to a comfortable temperature and level for shad, herring, striped bass, and white and yellow perch to migrate from the lower river and the Chesapeake Bay up the tidal estuaries to spawn in the rich, freshwater shallows. In springtime on the Rappahannock, you don't know what

you'll hook when you cast your fly or lure into the water; and that is one of many reasons why it's such a great river to fish.

The name "Rappahannock" in the native-American language, probably Algonquian, means, "rapidly rising and falling waters." It is not clear if this term referred to the changing of the tide four times a day on the tidal part of the river, or that the water level quickly sought equilibrium after heavy rains. When Captain John Smith explored the Virginia tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay in the early years of the 17th century, Algonquian Indians tribes, such as the Chickahominy, Rappahannock, Pamunkey, and Mattaponi lived along the shores and eventually lent their names to the rivers of what would become the Old Dominion.

Smith Coleman is a Fredericksburg school teacher and also runs a fly fishing and light tackle school and fly fishing guide service. It had been over 15 years since I had fished the Rappahannock for shad. Over the years their numbers had dwindled due to habitat degradation and over-fishing and it hardly seemed worth the trip, even if it was only an hour away. But now they are slowly returning, particularly the shiny, fluorescent hickories; their American shad cousins are still in trouble and hopefully will make a come back someday soon. For now, Smith was reacquainting me with a river I've always loved.

We were standing mid-stream on a sandbar between two large rocks that rose above the water even at high tide. The canoe we used to get there was tied to a bush growing out of the larger rock. The U.S. Highway 1 bridge was just upstream and it carried vehicles, occupants oblivious to the activity below, between Fredericksburg and Falmouth. The Fredericksburg shore was lined with anglers, and some waded out from the Falmouth side, but we were alone in the middle of the river; and our fly rod-launched Clouser





deep minnows were catching hickory shad one after the other.

Those using spinning tackle were scoring, too. Most were casting small, brightly-painted shad darts, usually two of these little jigs to a line. Occasionally, anglers would bring in two fish at a time, and, equally noteworthy, let them go. I remember back in the early 1980s, when most people would keep every shad and herring they caught, to be striped of the tasty roe and the flesh salted. It was encouraging and a sign of the new times. There is currently a closed season on American and hickory shad, so all the fish caught this day were released to carry on with their reproductive mission.

By late April and into May, at least in fairly "normal" times, the egg-laden striped bass join the shad on their spawning runs. While hickory shad are a light-tackle fish, an adult striper intent on reaching the spawning grounds can destroy light tackle and whisper-thin line. When stripers are around, Smith upgrades his tackle accordingly, using fly rods for a seven or eight weight line and medium-heavy spinning gear with at least 10 or 12 pound test line. Heavier fly and spinning gear will help you land the fish before it fights so hard and long that its survival comes into question.

It is not necessary, of course, to concentrate near the Highway 1 bridge to catch fish—shad and stripers can be caught all along the tidal river—but it is a traditional and convenient location where anglers socialize, trade secrets and fishing lore, and catch fish, too. If you are new to this type of fishing, this is an amenable spot because most anglers will willingly share their knowledge and skills.

Bass fishing guide Teddy Carr with a very respectable Rappahannock River large-mouth bass. Photos ©King Montgomery.

In the late spring and into the early summer, when the shad and the stripers have moved on downriver to the more brackish and saltier parts, the anglers' attention turns to the other species of gamefish found in these waters: smallmouth bass up to and beyond the Embury Dam; largemouth bass, the predominate species from the fall line to where the salt takes over from the freshwater; some huge catfish that have an angling following all their own (the state record channel catfish of 31.5 pounds is from the river); and the plentiful and cooperative sunfish, such as the bluegill and crappie.

Yes, the river is peaceful now and no longer serves as a boundary, a fault-line between opposing points of view; and it is no longer associated with death and destruction as it was 137 years ago.

Virginian Robert E. Lee watched the carnage below as Union regiments, brigades, and divisions fell like ripe wheat before the scythe of the grim reaper in the heavy and continuous Confederate musket and artillery fire. Field glasses in hand, General Lee, accompanied by Longstreet and a retinue of aides, said to his solemn officers, "It is well war is so frightful. Otherwise we should become too fond of it." Finally, the carnage was too much for even Burnside, and during the night of December 15, the remnants of his army stole back across the Rappahannock on the very pontoon bridges that had brought them to the killing side. And the river moved on, rapidly rising and falling, cleansing itself as it flowed, secure in its place in history.



©King Montgomery

Emily Simpson, a Fredericksburg fly angler, enjoys fishing just below Embury Dam along the fall line where anglers can wade out to reach their favorite fishing holes. The lower Rappahannock provides diverse habitat for fish, other aquatic creatures and waterfowl.

©Dwight Dyke

Teddy Carr, who lives in Locust Grove near Lake Anna, is a professional bass fishing guide who plies his trade on the tidal Potomac, James and Chickahominy rivers and on his Lake Anna home water. But as the bass fishing continues to improve, he finds himself willingly spending more time on the Rappahannock River, generally between Fredericksburg and Tappahannock. Below Tappahannock, as the water becomes saltier, saltwater fish take over from the largemouth bass.

"The Rapp just keeps getting better," he said, just as I set the hook on a chunky largemouth bass near the west side of the expansive Drakes Marsh near Leedstown, "and it's never crowded out here like it is on the Potomac." Here instead, human crowds were replaced by hundreds, no, thousands of ducks and geese that took wing and began their early evening movement from the rich feeding grounds of the river to their more secure roosting places. My kind of rush hour.

There are only two small cities on the tidal Rappahannock River, Fredericksburg and Tappahannock.

Thus, urban growth and industry have not been a serious factor in the health of the river. Recent environmental awareness and a few well-placed laws and regulations have helped the river and the ecosystem.

Teddy takes his clients to spots up and down the river where bass are most apt to bite. Teddy knows the river's diverse habitats: sometimes the fish are in the spatterdock fields, or tight to the fallen trees that line the river's banks, or on the flats or along the drop-offs into deeper water. Other times they feed in the shallows, where submerged aquatic vegetation grows.

In the spring while the shad, followed by the stripers, are moving upriver to spawn, largemouth bass leave the relative depths and move shallower. They will feed heavily after their winter-induced torpor, and prepare for their reproductive duties later in the spring as the water warms. Hungry and in the shallows, the bass readily attack Rat-L-Traps, spinnerbaits, and other lures that mimic small fishes. Colorful streamers on a fly rod score, too.

As the summer doldrums move in, the bass scatter and seek cover,



usually in or near grass beds, spatterdock fields, and in trees that have fallen into the water. Here, plastic worms, jigs, crankbaits, and slow-rolled spinnerbaits are best. Early and late in the day, during periods of reduced visibility, the bass hit top-water lures and flies, thus providing the ultimate action in an honorable sport.

Once fall is well on its way to winter, the largemouth bass gather and congregate in fertile areas to feed heavily before the winter cold lowers their metabolism and slows them down. The stripers also respond to the cooler waters, and come within range of well-cast flies and lures. Teddy Carr targets stripers in the fall, and his fishing clients often catch largemouth and striped bass in the same areas. With winter arriving, the river cycle is now complete.

The tidal Rappahannock now readily gives up its bounty from its mouth on the Chesapeake Bay, through its tidal freshwater reaches, on above the Embury Dam to near its mountain spring source. The river swells with life, and anglers like Teddy Carr and Smith Coleman re-

spect it, and release what they catch. And through it all the river rolls on, rapidly rising and falling in time. □

King Montgomery is a nationally-known outdoor writer who lives in Annandale. He is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.

- Smith Coleman guides on the upper and tidal Rappahannock and other streams in the area. Call him at Outdoor Adventures (540) 786-3334 or at (540) 710-6194.

- Teddy Carr guides on the tidal Rappahannock and other rivers and on Lake Anna. Call him at (540) 854-4271 for more information or to order his book *Fishing Lake Anna*.

- The Friends of the Rappahannock is a non-profit conservation organization of landowners and concerned citizens who wish to protect this beautiful river. For more information, call them at (540) 373-3448.

- The Leedstown Campground and launch ramp is at (804) 224-7445.

In early July of 1863, many of the same regiments that faced each other across the killing ground of Fredericksburg the winter before, met again, this time near the small Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg. Only this time, the tables were turned and the pride of the south, including General George Pickett's Virginia regiments, would dash themselves onto the Union defenses occupying the high ground. Once the smoke of battle cleared, the ground was littered with Confederate dead, and the victorious Union soldiers, grasping the gravity of it all, raised their rifles high and chanted, "Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!"



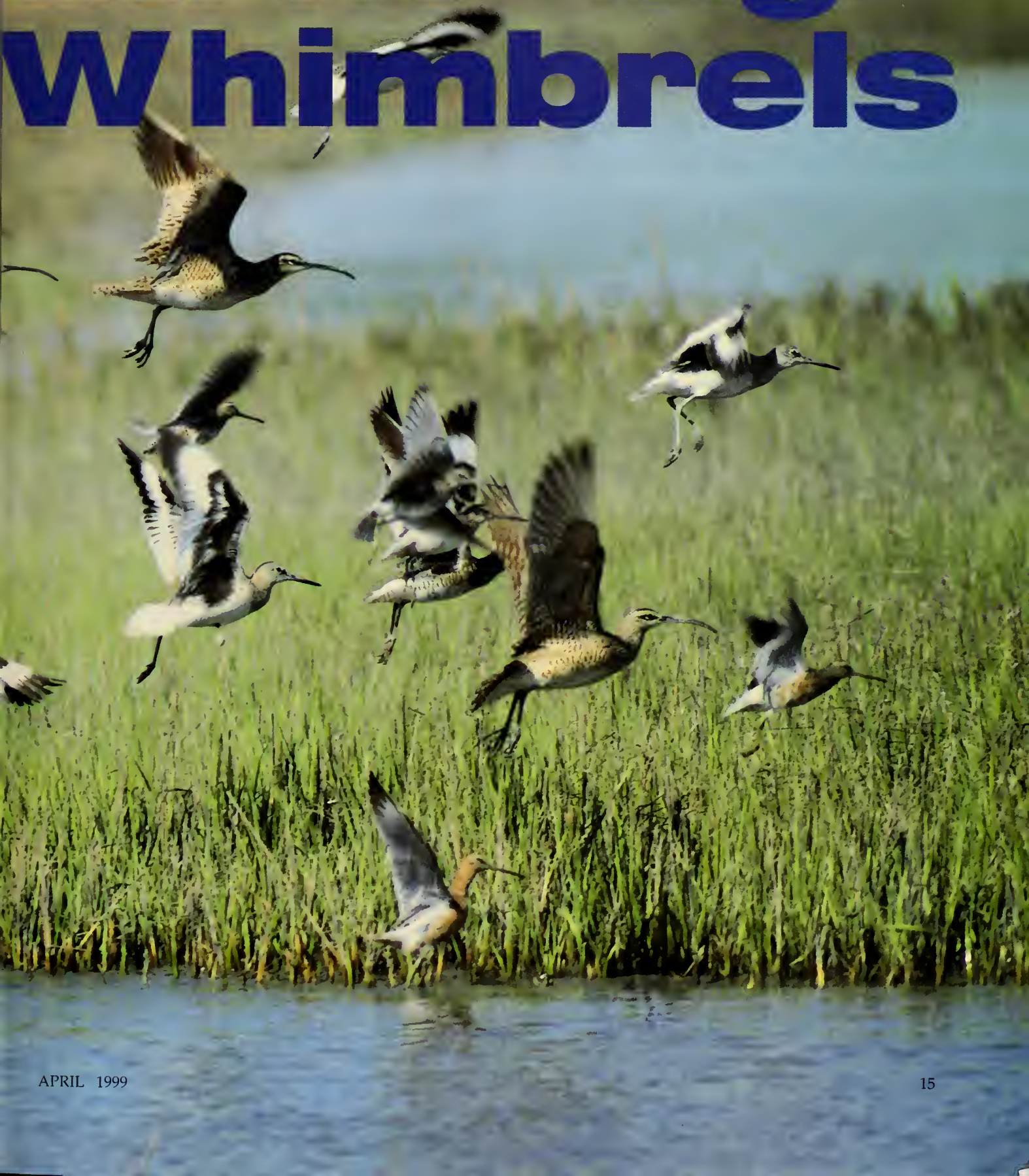
A large flock of shorebirds, likely sandpipers or similar migratory species, is captured in mid-flight over a lush green marsh. The birds are scattered across the upper two-thirds of the frame, with some showing dark plumage and others lighter, mottled patterns. Their wings are spread wide, and their long, straight bills are visible. The background is a soft-focus expanse of green grass and reeds, with a body of water visible at the bottom. The overall scene conveys a sense of dynamic movement and natural habitat.

A
of

Virginia's Eastern Shore may hold one of the largest densities of these migrating shorebirds in the Western Hemisphere, and scientists want to know why.

— Photo ©Curtis Badger

Gathering Whimbrels



by Curtis J. Badger

It was high tide and the breeze was blowing our skiff toward the salt marsh. Rick Kellam cut the engine and raised his binoculars. We drew closer to the flooding marsh meadow, and suddenly a head appeared among the reeds of grass. Then there was another, and another.

"There must be one hundred whimbrels in there," said Rick. Our boat nudged the bank, and as it did

ished here in coastal Virginia a century ago, when hunters would take to the marshes each May to bag a few "curlew" for the table. But the spring hunts of the past are long gone, and we were armed with nothing more powerful than 10x50 binoculars. Our assignment was to count whimbrels, and at the height of the spring migration, it was a daunting job.

Rick Kellam, recently retired from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, grew up in the seaside marshes of the Eastern Shore, and

Assessment Project, whose goal was to determine exactly how important Virginia's marshes and tidal flats are to migrating whimbrels. The study was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, which owns 45,000 acres on 14 barrier islands along the coast.

Scientists have known for years the importance of coastal wetlands to migrating waterfowl, and numerous studies have focused on migrating songbirds, such as warblers. But little is known about whimbrels, those leggy, long-necked shorebirds with the down-curved bill.



birds flushed from the grass, gathered in loose strings, and headed farther into the marsh meadow, there to search higher ground for fiddler crabs, or to rest until ebb tide uncovered the expansive tidal flats of the seaside.

We were on a spring whimbrel hunt, living a tradition that flour-

then went to work there. He had agreed to captain his boat for our whimbrel count, and his knowledge of the shallow bays and winding creeks was invaluable. With Rick were six volunteers, including myself, who had signed on as whimbrel counters. We were part of a six-week study called the Whimbrel Rapid

Barry Truitt, director of science and stewardship for the Conservancy, told me that a 1995 aerial survey of the Eastern Shore produced estimates of more than 40,000 birds, by far the largest densities in the Western Hemisphere. Our boat-based project would count whimbrels on land, or water, determining not only

the number of birds, but the habitats used at different tides.

Terry Thompson, who directed the whimbrel project for the Conservancy, designed a study in which teams of volunteer counters would go out twice a week for six weeks at the height of the spring migration. The same area—a six-mile swatch of tidal creeks, flats, and salt marsh—would be covered each day.

Counting whimbrels is not an exact science. The birds have an irritating habit of hunkering down in



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©Dwight Dyke

With maps, cameras, binoculars and a rising tide, volunteers gather at Willis Wharf and are briefed before heading out to count whimbrels. Last year a six-week study was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy to learn more about whimbrels. Each spring the birds stop over in large numbers on Virginia's Eastern Shore, while migrating between South America and Canada.

cordgrass at high tide, and even when they're feeding on the flats they seem to have an aversion to staying in one place for long. So we scanned the high grass for whimbrel heads, knowing we were missing many, and we did our best not to count the same flocks twice when working the flats.

We also had to learn to quickly distinguish whimbrels from other marsh birds such as willets, dowitchers, yellowlegs, and godwits. With their down-curved bill and dark eye stripe, whimbrels are fairly distinctive, but if you have a mixed flock of birds on a tidal flat at a distance, with the sun behind them, then counting can include more than a little guesswork.

Under Terry and Rick's direction, the count was probably as accurate as human eyes could make it. We all counted silently when approaching a flock, and then compared numbers. Most of the time we were within a bird or two of each other.

Preliminary data support what many scientists suspect, that Virginia's seaside is a vital stop on the whimbrel's journey from South America to breeding grounds in Canada. During the six-week study, 693 different sightings were made, with seven sightings of flocks of more than 100 birds. Volunteers were counting 1,000 whimbrels or more a day during the peak of the migration, which this year occurred at the end of April.

And the numbers are probably conservative, says Terry Thompson. "At high tide, when the birds are in the marsh, they're almost impossible to see, much less to count," she says. "We all felt that there were

more birds in the study area than we could actually see."

There is some evidence that for many whimbrels, the Virginia coast is their single staging stop. They fly directly from South or Central America to Virginia, rest and rebuild fat reserves, and then continue on to the Canadian provinces. Banding studies will shed further light on the flight itinerary of whimbrels.

Fortunately for the birds, the future of the Virginia rest stop is good. Most of the marshes and flats are protected either through state, federal, or private conservation ownership. The Conservancy has protected some 45,000 acres through its Virginia Coast Reserve, and the Commonwealth of Virginia owns Mock-

horn Island, a 7,000-acre inner island whose marshes and tidal flats are prime whimbrel habitat. Part of Fisherman Island, Cedar Island, Assawoman, and Assateague are protected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as National Wildlife Refuges.

Such protection cannot be assumed for the whimbrels' winter habitat, however. Particularly worrisome is that U.S. landholdings in the Panama Canal Zone are due to be turned over to the Republic of Panama in the year 2000. According to a recent study by the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William & Mary, the intertidal zone of the upper Bay of Panama is a vital wintering and staging area for

whimbrels, one of the few locations worldwide with enough prey species to sustain large numbers of shorebirds. Alteration of the shoreline in the area could have a significant negative impact on whimbrels and other species.

Unlike ducks and warblers, the whimbrel is not a glamour species; we know little about it. But that may soon change. The whimbrel census on the Eastern Shore is slated to become an annual event, and over time, we undoubtedly will learn more about the travels of this bird, and come to appreciate it more. □

Curtis Badger is a writer and photographer who lives along the Chesapeake Bay on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.



The unspoiled and protected nature of the Eastern Shore barrier islands not only benefit whimbrels, but also many other birds, plants and animals.

A young man is swinging on a rope over a river. He is shirtless and wearing white shorts with black stripes. The rope is attached to a tree branch above him. The background shows a lush green forest and a blue sky with white clouds. The text "Whim Away" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the top right of the image.

Whim Away

On the Nottoway

"Some of the fondest memories of my life have been related to days spent on the Nottoway River in Southampton County. As an educator and parent, I feel that happy experiences when people work, share, and play together help make us wonderful human beings."

"A day like we spent on the river should leave a lasting impression on the necessity of saving our environment."

Sandra Councill (Teacher and Trip Organizer)

"The cool, smooth waters of the Nottoway were beautiful and serene; seemingly unchanged for hundreds of years as generations lived off of it."

Steve Hatcher



Story by Sally Mills, photos ©Dwight Dyke

When Sandra Council was a little girl, she actually looked forward to the end of summer. The approaching Labor Day weekend marked the annual family camping trip when she could spend three adventure-filled days on the shores of the Nottoway River. From these early experiences, she developed a lifelong love for the river and a deep appreciation for the beauty of the natural world.

As a teacher in the Gifted Resource Program at Smithfield Middle School, Sandra strives to share these deep attachments with her students. And the best way to do that, in her opinion, is through hands-on, experiential learning. For the fourth year now, Sandra took a class of twenty-some students canoeing on the Nottoway for a day of outdoor fun, sharing, and learning. Sandra's father and brothers serve as river guides and naturalists, helping her students understand more about the natural and cultural treasures they are seeing as they float with the current.

This year was particularly challenging because many trees were down, and canoes had to be lifted over the fallen limbs. Though Sandra admits the group was probably too loud to see much wildlife (turtles excluded), they saw plenty of evidence—from raccoon tracks to deer prints. In September water levels are low, and the kids had ample sandbars to explore and rest upon.

Besides swimming and jumping from a rope swing, they learned to use binoculars for birdwatching, fished for brim and catfish, and enjoyed a marsh walk. The river is protected by a thick corridor of trees and its water, still clear. That's what makes this trip so special. According to Ms. Council, "Unless you have hands-on experience, it doesn't mean anything to you. Seeing the beauty of this place makes you want to have a part in saving it."

"The river is full of surprises."

"There is an ancient fish dam. It is an excellent place to find historical artifacts. Some parts of the river are five feet deep, and some aren't even a foot! The wildlife is outrageous. There are deer, ducks, turtles and tons of fish."

Courtney Hill



"A rope swing still sits where it was 30
some years ago."

"I think that everyone on the trip realized
just how important keeping our rivers and
lakes clean is."

Steve Hafner



*In between swimming, fishing, and boating students take time to learn more
about the plants and animals that live along the banks of the Nottoway River.*

"We could go at any pace we wanted and if we felt like swimming then we could just hop out of the boat and go for a dip. It's great to get out and have some fun with friends that [you] usually only see in class."

Bucky Lewis



The Nottoway is a very scenic river and offers excellent fishing and boating. Beginning in Nottoway County, it flows gently southeast forming the Chowan River in North Carolina.





"There were animal tracks along the sandbars and the remains of a raccoon's habitat in a little cave along the shore of the river."

"This trip really opened my eyes...this river was so clean and lifelike...We need to conserve it and use it wisely."

Kevin Parcetich



From these smiling faces it's a sure bet that spending a day in the outdoors learning about wildlife and nature beats any day in the classroom.



Talking Turkey

is Big Business
in Virginia



Lee Walker

(Left) Denny Quaiff and 85-year-old Karl Reidelbach, who has been hunting turkey and making calls most of his life, listens closely while the author works an old wing bone call.

by Denny Quaiff

Scientists have learned from archaeological findings that long before Columbus landed on this continent, turkey bones were used as calls by the American Indian. From that time period until the present, turkey hunters and commercial makers have been producing calls in order to lure wild turkeys into bow or gun range. The calls of yesteryear were handmade from whatever material was on hand. Today, call manufacturers have the very best materials available and some are using machines to mass produce calls in large numbers. A call maker from an earlier era working with his hands would have

spent endless hours to complete one.

In the turkey woods the two basic types of calls are friction and air-operated in a wide assortment of styles. The friction call is simply operated by striking or scraping a solid piece of wood, metal, graphite, glass or stone against one of the same to create the sound of the wild



©Scotty Lovett



The use of a terrapin shell with a thin piece of slate or cedar in the bottom, along with a cornucob and cedar striker, is just one of the old style calls that Carl Reidelbach uses to recreate the yelping sound of a wild turkey.

turkey. The air-operated group simply works by either inhaling or exhaling into the call. Both types of calls have their place in the history and future of turkey hunting.

Eighty-five-year-old Karl N. Reidelbach, of Bon Air, Virginia, who was raised on his parent's Louisa County dairy farm, has been hunting Virginia wild turkeys most of his life. Reidelbach's goal was to bag 100 turkeys before he retired from the sport. However, four years ago his wife's failing health required him to stay home and look after her. The last turkey he harvested was number 99 and he still recalls the first one tellingly.

Reidelbach explained, "It was a cold December morning and I remember my father knocking on the bedroom door. He said that he had heard turkeys behind the barn and for me to hurry up." Reidelbach went on to say, "We headed into a grove of cedar trees. My father sat down on a stump, cleaned out his cornucob pipe to use as a call and started yelping to the scattered

flock. He instructed me to sit real still on the ground between his legs. Turkeys seemed to come from everywhere, they were all around us."

Young Karl fired at one of the turkeys with his .22 caliber Hamilton single shot rifle that came from a Sears and Roebuck mail order catalog for \$1.98. At the crack of the gun the turkeys were gone and he thought he had missed.

Reidelbach continued, "I dropped my rifle and took off running toward the turkey that I had shot at. All of a sudden a turkey flushed off the ground in front of me. I sat down and started to cry. And then my father walked over and picked up my first turkey. It was lying only a few feet from where I was sitting. The 21 pound gobbler looked to be pretty near as big as me."

Last summer I had a chance to visit with Karl at his home. Trophy gobbler beards, deer antlers and pictures of hunting trips from years gone by graced the walls of his garage. I was quite impressed with his collection of turkey calls, Indian arrow heads, old guns and hunting memorabilia which provided a setting for stories and remembrance from the past.

Reidelbach has always been a strong supporter of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and national conservation organizations. He applauds the hard work of the National Wild Turkey Federation and believes that they deserve a great deal of the credit for helping to bring the wild turkey population to an all-time high. He has been a member of the federation since 1978.

Karl has always made his own turkey calls, "There were no sporting good stores around when I was a young boy growing up in the country. And when it came to turkey calls you learned to make your own or just about do without."

During my visit I learned that this old Louisa County farm boy had recreated old designs of wild turkey calls that he made from terrapin shells, rubber hoses and wing bones to only name a few. Reidelbach explained, "The terrapin shell creates a good sound chamber by properly placing a thin piece of slate or cedar in the bottom of the shell. My wooden strikers are made from cedar with a good cornucob end for balance and tone. With a little practice a hunter can make all of the basic wild turkey calls using the shell."

Another favorite call of Reidelbach is the wing bone. Reidelbach says, "The wing bone from a hen turkey has the best sound. I always carried one of my wing bone calls in my top shirt pocket when hunting. When used correctly the wing bone has a real natural sound. I would be afraid to even guess at how many turkeys I have called in with a wing bone. They are hard to beat."

Karl says, "The real fun of turkey hunting to me is calling. Turkeys have the best eyesight in the woods and they have always been hard to outsmart."

This past August, at the 15th annual Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show in Mechanicsville, Jim Clay with Perfection Turkey Calls, Inc. was one of the keynote speakers. Jim held seminars on hunting and calling the wild turkey.

Clay, who lives near Winchester, started turkey hunting 38 years ago. Jim and his partner Tommy Duvall opened Perfection Turkey Calls in 1971. Before becoming a full-time

Box calls are very popular among turkey hunters. The design has been around for many years and is easy to use. It produces a sound that's music to the ears of a lovesick wild turkey.

call manufacturer, Jim was a high school English teacher. Jim said, "It took quite awhile to get our business off the ground. It takes a long time for people to know who and what you are." During the past 10 years in business Jim has given over 220 seminars throughout Virginia. His seminars are entertaining and informative. Jim tries to offer all those who attend a little something extra to carry back to the turkey woods.

The modern day turkey call business has become more competitive than ever before. Clay explained, "New people are getting into this business everyday. There are more

and more part-time call makers who work out of their garages and basements than there were when we started in business. For example, in Pennsylvania alone there are over 200 call makers selling their products."

In 1998 Perfection manufactured 30 different types of calls for sale. Jim

©Dwight Dyke



said, "Our company still makes our calls by hand. We use an assembly line style to meet our production demands. And then each call is tuned for sound by a member of our staff before leaving our shop." Clay went on to say, "Even though we still sell more diaphragm calls than any other, our biggest seller this past year was the Black Demon. This friction call is made with a black aluminum face. We are using graphite and maple strikers with this new design. This call works very well under just about any type of weather conditions. We can't make them fast enough."

When I asked Jim if he had any advice for someone just starting to hunt and call turkeys he said, "Buy some turkey hunting videos. It is much different today than when I started. Hunters back then learned the best way they could. Nowadays a beginner can sit down and learn the basics for hunting and calling turkeys by simply watching a quality turkey hunting video. Most of the videos today provide hunting tips and instructions for calling. We have five videos on the market that come packaged with calls. This will definitely get a hunter started." Interested readers looking for top-notch turkey calls can contact Perfection by calling toll free 1-800-422-9357 for calls that are made by hunters for hunters to do the job.

Calling the wild turkey has always been a challenge. It is this writer's opinion that turkey hunters and call makers from the past and present share a common goal. Their ongoing search for the perfect call that will fool a wise old turkey can only be appreciated by those of us who have witnessed the thrill. The excitement of enticing a bird into gun or bow range through the skills of authentically reproducing the sounds of the wild turkey is an age-old tradition. □

Denny Quaiff is executive editor of Whitetail Times magazine, and also enjoys hunting Virginia's wild turkeys.



©Dwight Dyke



©Dwight Dyke

Perfection Turkey Calls located in Virginia, is just one of the many companies around the country producing videos to teach people how to master the art of turkey calling.



Journal



©Reese F. Lukei Jr.

An Unexpected Visitor

by Donald J. Schwab

The merlin is a small falcon around 10 inches in length, with a bit more than a 20-inch wingspread. Of the other falcons commonly encountered in Virginia, the American kestrel is smaller, while the peregrine is larger. Adult male merlins are blue-backed, with adult females and immatures being brown. All merlins have a heavily streaked chest. Unlike Virginia's other two falcons, the kestrel and the peregrine, the merlin does not have a distinct mustache.

On October 6, 1998 at the Wise Point Raptor Banding Station, Reese Lukei (research associate, The Cen-

ter for Conservation Biology at the College of William & Mary) was having one of the best merlin trapping days of the season. He had been out all day and by 3:30 p.m. had handled nearly two dozen merlins. Late in the day, about an hour before closing down the banding station, a small falcon was seen flying towards the station. In the blind with Reese were two observers, Bill Smith (USFWS) and Andrew Zadnik (VDGIF). Reese started working the lure in front of the blind. The bird came in, grabbed the lure, Reese released the trigger on the bow net, and the falcon was caught.

Catching a merlin, or for that matter any raptor is exciting whether it is your first time or 1,000th time. On

top of your normal excitement add trapping a bird that is different and rare, and its kind of like getting your first bicycle all over again. Reese knew right away he had something special, a bird he had not seen in his 17 years of working the Wise Point Station; a white or nearly white merlin.

The bird was a female its age unknown. She was not a true albino, but showed Leucism, imperfect albinism or diluted plumage. The falcon's eyes, bill and feet were normal in color. Her markings were all there but "diluted" or faded. Reese contacted William S. Clark, an eminent raptor biologist and a resident of Virginia, who stated he has seen many "diluted" plumaged raptors,

but never a merlin. Quite a catch.

Reese banded the bird, photographed, and released it. The day ended with 36 hawks being banded:

American Kestrel	1
Merlin	25
Peregrine	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4
Cooper's Hawk	4
Northern Harrier	1

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is one of the best spots in the eastern United States to see large flights of these falcons during the early portion of the fall migration (late September through October). Several good areas to view merlins and other birds of prey during the fall season are: The Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge, Kiptopeke State Park, KESTREL Hawk Watch Platform, the GATR Tract of the Mockhorn Wildlife Management Area, and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. □

1998 Commonwealth Valor and Distinguished Service Awards

Virginia Game Warden, Robert George, has been honored with a 1998 Commonwealth Distinguished Service Award. The Commonwealth Valor and Distinguished Service Awards were created in 1987 by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce to recognize public safety officers who went above and beyond the call of duty in their jobs, often incurring great personal risk.

On August 29, 1998, Officer George was on patrol on Philpott Lake, in Henry County. While checking an individual (who was fishing from the bank) for a fishing license, he heard a small child cry for help. Officer George ran into the water and pulled a seven-year-old girl to safety. The young lady was playing with her sister and wandered out into the water, which was over her head. Both parents of the girl credited Officer George with preventing a tragedy. Quick thinking avoided a possible drowning.



(Center) Game warden Robert George receives his 1998 Distinguished Service Award. (Left) Attorney General Mark Earley and Lt. Governor John Hager (right) were on hand to honor recipients.

The Virginia Public Safety Foundation took over the administration of the awards program in 1993 when it was created through the merger of the Virginia Silver Star Foundation and the Virginia Police Foundation. The awards were given in the newly defined Valor and Distinguished Service Categories with 12 awards presented in each category. □

1999 Photography Workshops With Bill & Linda Lane

It's Friday evening and the room is crowded with folks, their cameras and paraphernalia, sipping drinks, snacking on lite hors d'oeuvres wondering what's to come. Most are there alone—but all have a common interest in photography and the great outdoors. They are ready for

experiencing new adventures in new places. Every workshop with the Lanes is an experience. And each park, at which their workshops are held, provides its own unique setting in which to experience nature.

Many of the participants return, not because they failed to learn, but because it's an opportunity to practice what they have learned without the normal daily interferences for a whole weekend. As one participant described, it's a weekend to indulge yourself, eat, sleep and shoot photographs.

Bill and Linda Lane have been conducting workshops for the past six years. This year workshops will be held at Westmoreland State Park in early May, Douthat State Park later in May, Hungry Mother State Park in early October and False Cape State Park in October.

Each workshop will be filled with



©Linda W. Lane

The popularity of wildlife photography is growing as more and more people are looking for ways to have fun in the outdoors.



©Dwight Dyke

Operation Spruce-Up is a great way to volunteer to help beautify your community. Picking up trash and improving habitat for wildlife are just a few of the programs you can do to get involved.

field work and instructions, photo critiques, some classroom work, slide shows, searching for unusual composition, experimentation with technique, exchange of ideas and taking inventory of a variety of equipment available. All this along with good food, conversation and camaraderie makes for a great weekend experience.

Additional workshops will be held in West Virginia, Tennessee and on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. For further information call (804) 883-

7740. For reservations call Virginia State Parks at 1-800-933-PARK or in the Richmond calling area 225-3867.

Operation Spruce-Up

Celebrate the great outdoors and join in the fun during Operation Spruce-Up! Held during the month of April, the spring campaign recognizes and encourages volunteers who contribute their time and energy to improve our natural resources. Operation Spruce-Up has resulted

in an overwhelming response from citizens across Virginia. Volunteers have been working in their own communities, state parks, or other locations, picking up litter and debris, planting trees, shrubs and flowers, collecting recyclable materials, improving habitat for wildlife, restoring riparian buffers, and much more. When you consider the combined labor and thousands of hours of effort, volunteer service continues to be of enormous value to their communities and to the Commonwealth.

Plan your own community, church, or school cleanup or join a planned event at a state park. Learn more about conservation practices, such as using native plants, and the benefits of vegetative buffers. Volunteers participating in registered events during Operation Spruce-Up can receive Certificates of Appreciation signed by Governor Gilmore.

Corporate sponsors are an integral part of Operation Spruce-Up. Contributions from corporations, small businesses organizations and private individuals are used to defray costs, so that no taxpayer monies are used for postage and materials.

A photography contest will once again be sponsored by Richmond Camera and the Department of Conservation and Recreation as part of Operation Spruce-Up. Last year David Brickley, Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation announced the winners at the Shockhoe Bottom Arts Center, where an exhibit featuring the prize-winning images were on display.

The best-in-show prize for the Operation Spruce-Up Photography Contest was awarded to Bob Stewart of Glen Allen, Virginia. He won a log cabin getaway at a Virginia State park of his choice.

To register, or for more information, call 1-800-933-PARK, or in the Richmond area call 786-5056. You can also visit their website at: <http://www.state.va.us/~dcr/tem p/opersu.htm>. □

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

A Spring Wild Turkey Dinner

Many of our lucky turkey hunters prefer to "breast out" their bird. This gives them white meat only. The legs and thighs make delicious meals too. These dark meat pieces can be placed in a crock-pot with one cup of chicken broth and cooked on LOW heat for 7 to 8 hours or until fork tender.

Menu

Peanut Spread

Wild Turkey Breast In Skillet

Vinaigrette Greens

Hummingbird Cake

Peanut Spread

- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 1/4 cup chopped dry roasted peanuts
- 1/3 cup chili sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin

Combine all ingredients and refrigerate for 24 hours for flavors to blend. Serve with crackers.

Wild Turkey Breast in Skillet

- 1/4 cup flour
- 1/4 teaspoon curry powder
- 4 or 5 uncooked wild turkey breast slices, skinned, 4 ounces each, 1/2-inch thick
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, divided
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 3/4 cup thinly sliced carrot
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced celery
- 1/2 cup pecan halves
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup white table wine

In a shallow dish, combine flour and curry powder. Dredge breast slices in flour mixture to coat. In a 12-

inch skillet, heat 1 tablespoon butter and 1 tablespoon oil over medium heat. Add breast slices. Cook for 3 to 5 minutes or until meat is golden brown, turning over once. Transfer breast slices to warm platter. Set aside. In same skillet, heat remaining 1 tablespoon butter and 1 tablespoon oil over medium heat. Add carrot, celery, pecans and raisins. Cook for 5 to 8 minutes or until vegetables are crisp-tender and pecans are toasted, stirring occasionally. Arrange breast slices over vegetable mixture. Pour wine over breast slices. Cook for 5 to 8 minutes or until vegetables are tender and liquid in pan thickens slightly. Serve over hot, cooked rice. Makes 4 servings.

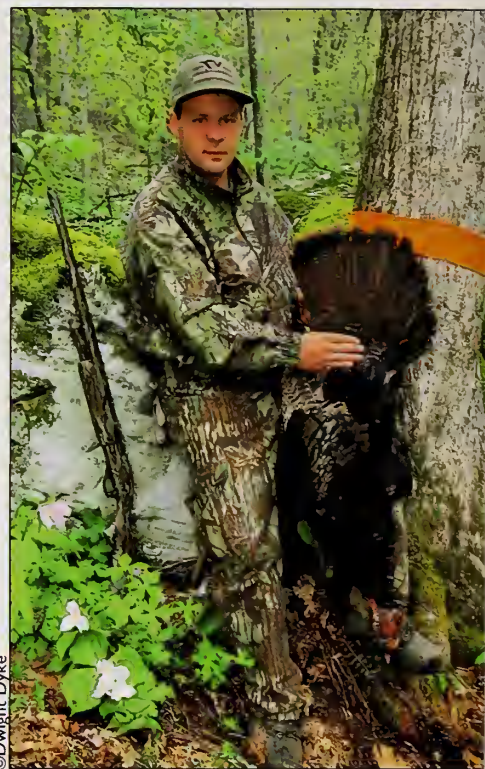
Vinaigrette Greens

- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon dry mustard
- Salt to taste
- Garlic powder to taste
- 3 to 4 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 cup olive or vegetable oil
- 1 package (16 ounces) gourmet salad greens

Process first 5 ingredients in a blender until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides. Turn blender on high and add oil in a slow, steady stream. Drizzle over greens. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Hummingbird Cake

- 3 cups flour
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon



©Dwight Dyke

- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 can (8 ounces) crushed pineapple, undrained
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 2 cups chopped bananas

Combine first 5 ingredients in a large bowl. Add eggs and oil, stirring until dry ingredients are moistened. **Do not beat.** Stir in vanilla, pineapple, pecans and bananas. Bake in a greased 10-inch tube pan at 350° for 50 minutes or until cake tests done. Cool 10 minutes and remove from pan. □



On The Water

by Kathy Gillikin, Boating Education Instructor

The Real Story of Buoys

Navigational buoys on the water are numbered for easier location verification. These numbers correspond to the numbers on the navigational charts, or waterway maps. The numbering system starts with "1" at the mouth of the waterway (the part closest to the ocean), and the numbers increase as you travel further inland, or away from the ocean.

The buoys on the port side heading inland are green and odd-numbered, while the buoys on the starboard side heading inland are red and even-numbered. Used in conjunction with a navigational chart, the numbered buoys will guide you and keep you informed of your position on the waterway. Remember that after heavy weather conditions the buoys may have moved, or worse, may have been disconnected. Keep checking the numbers with your position on the chart and you will find your way.

Chart Colors

Navigational charts are the maps of the waterways. Colored charts are more than just decorative. The colors represent different water depths and conditions of the waterway. Here is a list of the standard colors and their meanings for offshore charts (ocean). Inland waterway charts usually show the depth in feet, not fathoms.

Light Tan - Low spots during low tide. These areas are typically sandbars and oyster bars that become dry when the tide is out.

Tan - High land where there is no water. If you see this color, steer clear of it or you will be grounded.

White - Water that is deeper than three fathoms (1 fathom = 6 feet; 3 fathoms = 18 feet).

Light Blue - Water that is deeper than one fathom, but is no deeper than three fathoms (between 6 and 18 feet deep).

Blue - Water that is less than one fathom deep (less than 6 feet deep). Avoid this area if you have a large boat with a deep draft.

Magenta - Dangerous areas and navigational markers.

Dark Green - Green navigational markers.

Audio Aids

When visibility is low, sound signals are crucial to navigation. First of all it is important to slow down to avoid collisions, especially collisions with navigation markers themselves. Some markers will also have lights and/or sound signals to help you avoid them. By slowing down, you will have more time to react and the engine roar is decreased so you will be sure to hear any sound signals from markers or other boaters.

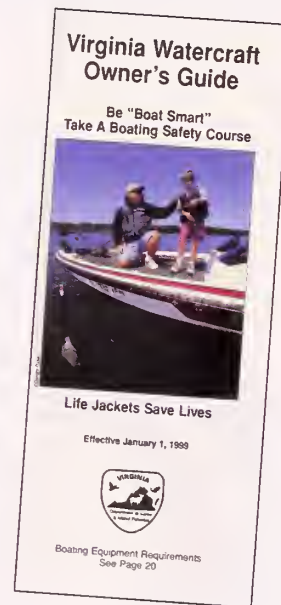
Knowing the standard sound signals is very helpful if you need to communicate to another boater in a restricted visibility situation. You may use a horn or whistle to make these sounds, but it should be loud enough for the water and able to sustain a long blast. The sound signal code is as follows:

1 Short Blast: I am turning to my starboard (right) side and will pass you on my port (left) side.

1 Long Blast: I am getting underway (usually used for leaving port/dock).

2 Short Blasts: I am turning to my port (left) side and will leave you on my starboard (right) side.

3 Short Blasts: I am operating in reverse.



For a free copy of the Virginia Watercraft Owner's Guide, write: Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Information Office, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

1 Long Blast AND then 1 Short Blast: Please lift the drawbridge.

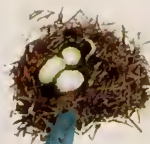
5 Short Blasts: Danger or doubt (As a response to another boater, the 5 short blasts will tell the other boater not to do what she/he intends to do.)

When you HEAR a signal like one of these from another boater, check for safety first and if the area is safe, you may respond with the same sound signal to tell the other boater to proceed with her/his intended direction. When you GIVE a sound signal, you will know it is safe to proceed in that direction upon hearing an echoed sound signal. Always proceed slowly and exercise extreme caution. No matter who is supposed to have the right-of-way, all boaters involved are responsible for any damages. □



Naturally Wild

by Spike Knuth



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

The yellow-bellied sapsucker is a bird you might see all winter in Virginia although, among the woodpeckers, it is the one that is most apt to migrate south. Its main food source is—as its name implies—tree sap, especially when the sap is “running” in spring.

It bores holes in trees, rows of varying lengths, which can be viewed as being horizontal or vertical. They sometimes look like they’ve been riddled with a machine gun! Depending on the type of tree, sometimes the holes are domed shaped and sometimes they look like squares or rectangles with rounded corners, looking mesh-like as if someone used a template to carve them out. In most cases they leave enough bark so the tree isn’t girdled and killed, although possibly vulnerable to disease.

They return to these “feeding wells” regularly. Sapsuckers have a tongue that’s brush-like enabling it to sweep up tree sap. Its habits benefit other animals. Chickadees, yellow-rumped warblers, hummingbirds, red-bellied woodpeckers, squirrels and others come to the sapsucker’s sap wells to feed. Sapsuckers will also feed on seeds, wild fruits and nuts and insects and insect larvae.

They can be recognized by the black and white striped pattern on their head, with males having a bright red forehead, crown and throat. Both species have a black bib on the breast and their bellies are dirt white with a yellowish wash and black markings. They hang away from the tree while other woodpeckers tend to “hug” the tree.

Sapsuckers are silent in winter but get very noisy in spring, and like other woodpeckers, it will hammer on anything that resonates as part of its courtship ritual and territorial claims. They nest in dead or decaying trees, frequently alongside rivers or in swampy areas. □



Spike Knuth

April Ahead

by Jack Randolph

If you want to take a spring day and fill it with high excitement and beauty, April is a good month for it. Actually, mid-April would be more precise, because April, like fine wine, seems to get better as it gets older.

It's all a matter of getting things in their place and getting them up and running. The month usually opens with white perch doing their spring spawning thing with bloodworm baits gathering good catches on the Rappahannock and other tidal rivers. Yet, before long the perch fishing is eclipsed by the rush of herring and shad as they fill the rivers with their silvery numbers.

Things sort of come to a head in the middle of the month when the spring gobbler season opens and sportsmen have more than a full plate, especially when you pile on the landlocked striped bass runs up the rivers and the availability of super big roe-laden bass in many of our ponds, rivers and reservoirs.

I have made a habit of setting aside a few April days to enjoy a rare combination of hunting and fishing, which isn't available at other times of the year, with the exception of early May.

On such days the alarm clock goes off early enough to get the whole family mad at me as I, as usual, fail to exit the house as quietly as I should at that ridiculous hour one has to start in order to catch an amorous turkey gobbler soon after he flies out of his roost.

Turkey hunting being what turkey hunting is, many mornings are more exciting than they are productive and after you have put the gobblers to sleep with your attempts at turkey talk you can stow the gun and cammie-jammies and head for the closest shad stream. Of course, if

you had a lucky morning a stop at a game checking station enroute would be well advised.

Although crack-of-dawn fishing is about the best kind, late-morning shad fishing is still good enough to tack on behind your turkey hunt. I have paired up turkey hunts at Fort A.P. Hill with shad fishing on the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg with considerable success. Fort Pickett matches up with the Nottoway in much the same fashion.

American or white shad continue to enjoy a closed season in the Chesapeake Bay and the tidal rivers that flow into it. This year may be a milestone in the shad history of Virginia because the fishway at Bosh-er's Dam on the James River should be passing some shad and we may see them as far up the James as Scottsville and further before the spring is over.

I remember one year, before the white shad season was closed, when I stopped in Fredericksburg after a fruitless turkey hunt at A.P. Hill. At Chesley's Tackle Shop in Fredericksburg the late Reggie Chesley was still in command and he advised me that the shad fishing had slowed considerably, but I had the whole day off and decided to try anyhow.

Just below the Route 1 Bridge I was surprised to find the Rappahannock River deserted as I opened hostilities testing some store-bought shad darts on four pound test line. It appeared that the river below the surface was equally deserted as I started to march through my collection of shad darts as one pages through a fly book on a slow day.

By and by I came across some totally fluorescent orange darts I made from clincher sinkers. I learned the trick from guys in an Izaak Walton Chapter in Maryland.

A clinch sinker, as you probably know, is shaped sort of like a little torpedo with "ears" at either end that are bent over to secure the sinker to the line. There is also a groove in the sinker to accommodate the line.

To transform the sinker into a dart, a 1/4-ounce sinker would be cut in half, making the heads for two darts. Simply slip the hook shank into the slot in the half sinker and secure it by bending the lead "ear" down. The eye of the hook is at the end where the sinker was cut and the business end of the hook was at the "ear" end. Use small jig hooks so that the eye of the hook is properly positioned. I add some epoxy glue to fix the hook in position before I dip the lead half sinker in white paint to form a base for whatever color I want to end up with. Tie a few short sprigs of bucktail or calftail to the hook and you're in business.

I cast my orange dart slightly upstream and as it swung down with the current something grabbed it and took off for Tappahannock. My four pound test line proved to be only a minor annoyance as it easily snapped as the fish headed east.

I pulled the four pound test spool out of my ultra-light reel and stuck in a fresh spool with 6 pound test line. I tied on another dart and instantly I was engaged in a battle with another east-bound sub, only this time things held together and after a long struggle I caught and released a four or five pound white shad.

As we slip away from April and head towards May, don't forget that this is the month those lunker bass turn on at Briery Creek Lake. In fact some husky ones have already been caught, but yours may still be there.

